

## A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE ISSUES OF FARMERS FROM "ȚARA HAȚEGULUI", ROMANIA

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**Abstract:** Located in the southwestern part of Transylvania, in Hunedoara County, "Țara Hațegului" covers an area of 155 square kilometers, bordered on the south by the Retezat Mountains, on the east and northeast by the Șureanu Mountains, on the west by the Țarcu Mountains, and north of the Poiana Ruscă Mountains. The agriculture of "Țara Hațegului" represents the basic activity of the economy of this area. After 1989, agriculture underwent profound changes through the abolition of agricultural production cooperatives and state-owned agricultural enterprises, which led to the return to private ownership of agricultural land and its fragmentation. In this paper, the authors analyse the problems faced by farmers in "Țara Hațegului", in order to offer solutions to revitalize the agriculture.

**Key words:** SWOT analysis, farmers, agricultural issues

### INTRODUCTION

With an impressive historical dowry Țara Hațegului enjoys a privileged position in the historiography of Romania, being one of the most important and well-known hearths of uninterrupted civilization in the entire Romanian space. Recognized for its historical importance Țara Hațegului represents the cradle of Daco-Roman civilization on the national territory, an area of representation for the ancient and medieval fortifications in the wall, an area full of historical monuments [8].



Figure 1. Map of the communes in Țara Hațegului

Source: own processing

Located in the southwestern part of Transylvania, in Hunedoara County, Țara Hațegului having, like all the other areas called “country”, well defined geographically, a natural delimitation, it overlaps the depression with the same name, bordered, to the south, by Retezat Mountains, east and northeast, by Șureanu Mountains, the west, of the Tarcu Mountains, and north of Poiana Ruscă Mountains [10].

The rural system of Țara Hațegului consists of 11 communes and the town of Hațeg, which together group together a number of 88 villages and hamlets [11].

The agriculture of Țara Hațegului is one of the important activities in the economy of this area, registering different evolutions from one locality to another, due to the level of resources specific to each locality and the history of economic activities carried out in that area. Țara Hațegului covers an area of 155 km<sup>2</sup> [2].

**Table 1.**

**Land fund from Țara Hațegului (ha)**

Structure	Surface	%
<b>Total</b>	<b>155,194</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Agricultural</b> , from which:	73,455	47.3
- arable	16,688	22.7
- pastures	34,847	47.4
- hayfields	21,464	29.2
- orchards	456	0.7
<b>Non-agricultural</b> , from which:	81,739	52.7
- forests	66,499	81.4

Source: data processed according to INS - Tempo online (2014 last year presented in statistics) [15]

The structure of the land fund of Țara Hațegului is characteristic of the depression areas where the disturbed landforms dominate, the agricultural and non-agricultural land having almost identical weights with a slight increase of the non-agricultural land. The structure of the arable land is specific to the hilly and mountainous areas, where the mountain meadows have the highest share of agricultural (76.6%), of which natural grasslands 29.2%. Therefore, the dominant plant resource, the main one of Țara Hațegului, is represented by the natural meadows - the basis of the development of animal breeding, mainly of herbivores: sheep, goats, cattle. It is worth mentioning that out of the total non-agricultural area, 81.4% represents the area occupied by forests, and the difference of 18.6% (15240 ha) is represented by the gloss of water, constructions, roads, degraded and unproductive lands, etc.

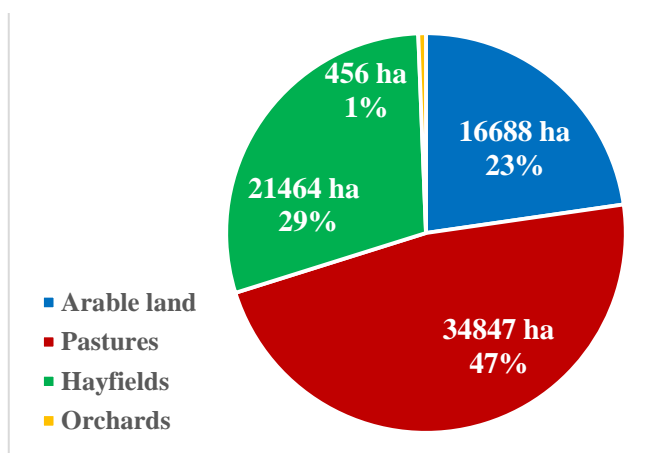
The areas owned by each commune have not changed in recent years. Of the 12 component communes, it is worth noting the significant area of Râu de Mori, Pui and Sălașu de Sus communes, which amounts to 54% of the area of Țara Hațegului (Table 2).

**Table 2.**

**Total area (ha)**

Common	Surface	Common	Surface
Baru	14,571	Râu de Mori	38,632
Bretea Română	10,036	Sarmisegetusa	7,312
Densus	13,612	Sălașu de Sus	22,303
General Berthelot	3,074	Sântămăria Orlea	6,780
Pui	22,879	Totesti	2,203
Răchitova	7,359	Hațeg	6,433
		<b>Țara Hațegului</b>	<b>155,194</b>

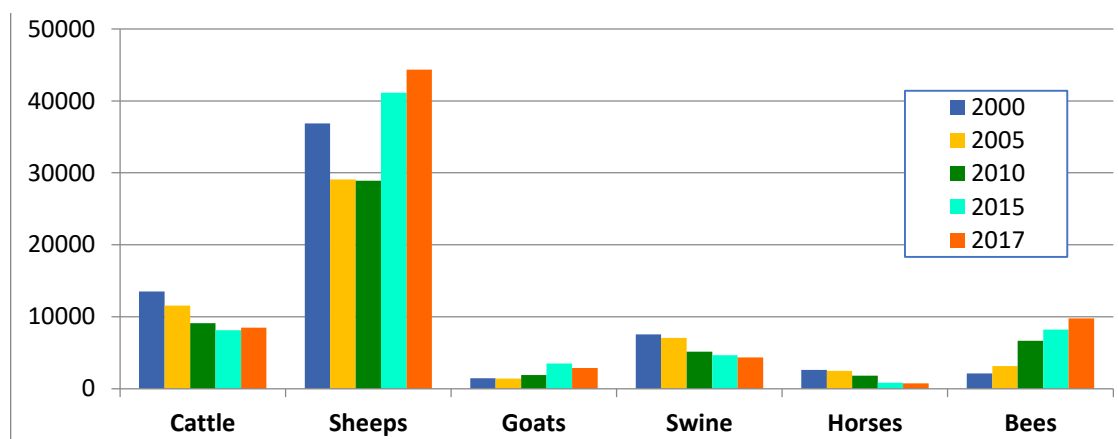
Source: data processed according to INS – Territorial statistics [16]



**Figure 2. The structure of the agricultural land fund in Țara Hațegului**

Source: data processed according to INS - Tempo online [15]

The surface structure of 73,455 ha of agricultural land (at the level of 2014, the last available in statistics) is presented in Figure 2. The most important share, of 76% (56,311 ha), was owned by the land occupied by pastures and hayfields, followed by the arable land by 23%, respectively orchards by only 1%. In the researched area, there are no vineyards, only sporadically in the yards and gardens of households.



**Figure 3. Evolution of livestock in Țara Hațegului, (no.)**

Source: Authors' development based on statistical and collected data [13, 16, 17]

Analysing the evolution of the number of animals by species (Figure 3), it is found that the number of cattle, pigs and horses decreases during the analysed period, and the number of sheep and goats increases. There are also many bee families in Țara Hațegului.

Economic and social status of the rural area of Hațeg and of each commune in the area, after 1989, underwent profound transformations: the return to private ownership of agricultural land and, in part, of forest land, the privatization of most of the remaining commercial companies, the bankruptcy and liquidation of a large number of industrial enterprises (mining, industrial processing, food) which led to the emergence of industrial unemployment, the destruction or demolition of numerous mansions and palaces built mostly by old Romanian families (some of them Hungarianized over time) that show the Romanian permanence on these lands, the abolition of CAPs and IAS, an obvious exodus of the active and qualified young population to other areas of Romania but especially abroad [7].

Natural resources extremely diverse and high quality landscaping [3], richness of historical and natural monuments, many parks and nature reserves, the existence of a relatively stable population over time, numerically and qualitatively, agricultural land,

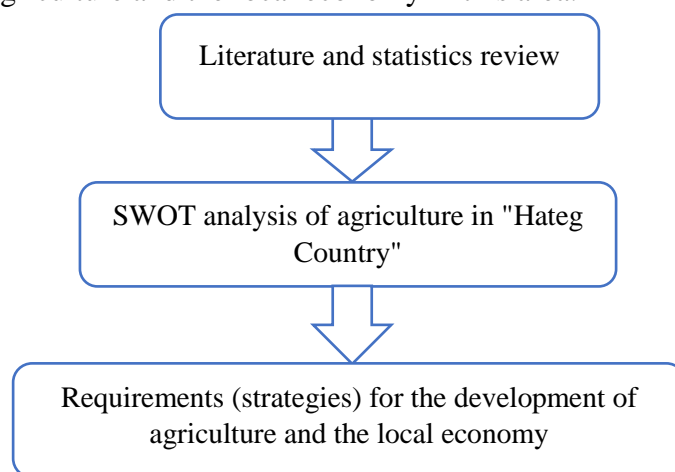
especially mountain natural meadows, high forest fund quality and diversity, the existence of an impressive number of historical, paleontological, biodiversity, economic and sociological studies and research, a hydropower system and a potential for expanding the production of clean green energy, etc., are potential for general economic development and sustainable rural development, is the sine qua non of developing a strategy in Țara Hațegului.

The main cereals grown in Țara Hațegului are wheat and corn. In addition, pastures and hayfields have significant shares in the agricultural area of Țara Hațegului. The yields fluctuate from year to year, depending on climatic conditions and less due to the introduction of new technologies for plant cultivation and animal husbandry [4]. Regarding the evolution of the number of animals by species, it is noted that the number of cattle, pigs and horses decreased during the analysed period, and the number of sheep and goats increased. There was also a significant increase in bee families.

Considering the research undertaken by authors in the field and the bibliography studied in the field, this paper aims at a SWOT analysis of the agriculture of Țara Hațegului and the formulation of some requirements for the development of the local economy.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study is based on a field research, carried out in the rural area of Țara Hațegului. At the level of each commune there were meetings and interviews with farmers and representatives of local communities. Based on the data collected from the field and the statistic, using the SWOT method, the authors undertook an analysis of advantages, disadvantages, opportunities and challenges of agriculture development in Țara Hațegului. This analysis allowed us, finally, to formulate some requirements (strategies) for the development of agriculture and the local economy in this area.



**Figure 4. Stages of development of the paper**

The “strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT)” analysis has been widely preferred and used in agricultural evaluations [9]. It presents processes of strategic development for programs or projects [1]. SWOT analysis is widely used to develop systematic strategies and support approaches to project and program decision making [6]. Thus, Shao and Shao (2017) [12] using the SWOT method analyzed the development possibilities of modern agriculture in Jilin Province. Mishra et al. 2021[9] used SWOT analysis in order to evaluate the current agricultural safety practices by the farmers and its impact for a sustainable agriculture in Odisha (India). Fertu et al. (2019) [5] analysed using the SWOT method the strong and weak points of the Romanian precision agriculture in order to obtaining a high production with low costs.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

The research undertaken in the field in the area of Țării Hațegului, together with the bibliography searched by the researchers of the Research Center for Sustainable Rural Development of Romania from the Timișoara Branch of the Romanian Academy, led us to prepare the following SWOT analysis of the area (Table 3).

**Table 3.**

### SWOT analysis of the agriculture of Țara Hațegului

STRONG POINTS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Favourable climatic conditions for agriculture;</li> <li>– Existence of large agricultural areas with pastures and hayfields;</li> <li>– Tradition in raising animals: cows, sheep, goats, horses;</li> <li>– Existence of successfully operating farms;</li> <li>– Landforms corresponding to the development of agriculture, animal husbandry and agrotourism;</li> <li>– Reduced use of pesticides and fertilizers;</li> <li>– High fishing and hunting potential;</li> <li>– Making traditional food and traditional drinks;</li> <li>– Harvesting and marketing forest products: mushrooms, berries;</li> <li>– The existence of composesorates in some localities;</li> <li>– Existence of products with traditional and local specificity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Presence of uncultivated land;</li> <li>– Shredding of land properties;</li> <li>– Uncontrolled afforestation of pastures and hayfields;</li> <li>– Poor quality management in the field of agricultural exploitation;</li> <li>– Excessive bureaucratization of legislation and institutions;</li> <li>– Lack of motivation and material resources to facilitate the employment of agricultural specialists in rural areas;</li> <li>– Reduced access to rural consultancy services due to the non-existence of these positions at local level;</li> <li>– Absence of an agricultural bank to finance agriculture and rural development as a matter of priority;</li> <li>– Poorly represented endemic and valuable fruit tree species;</li> <li>– Coverage with veterinary medical services is reduced;</li> <li>– Low level of processing of agricultural and livestock products, with low added value;</li> <li>– Insufficient storage space for vegetables and fruits.</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Possibility to increase the level of information in accessing European projects;</li> <li>– Possibility of developing centers for the collection and processing of agricultural products;</li> <li>– The possibility of developing livestock farms by accessing European funds;</li> <li>– Possibility to develop crafts and traditions based on local agricultural products;</li> <li>– Existence of the framework and initiatives to support and encourage the marketing of traditional products;</li> <li>– Increasing the competitiveness of the agricultural sector by supporting young farmers in business development;</li> <li>– Possibility of introduction and re-introduction of valuable fruit species;</li> <li>– Possibility of capitalizing on the superior potential of hunting and fishing;</li> <li>– Possibility of developing micro-farms in rural areas with public co-financing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Increased pressure on the active workforce;</li> <li>– Poor absorption of European funds;</li> <li>– Poor information of farmers about European norms;</li> <li>– Lack of an active and constant market for the sale of agricultural products;</li> <li>– Competition from large agricultural producers and distributors;</li> <li>– Abundance of food from other countries in supply markets;</li> <li>– The increase in drought periods during one year, coupled with the lack of irrigation systems, leads to low and poor quality agricultural production;</li> <li>– Lack of insurance for agriculture, lack of information or outdated mentality.</li> </ul>

Source: Authors' development based on local development strategies of communes in Țara Hațegului from 2014-2020 [14]

The research carried out in the rural localities from Țara Hațegului, in particular the knowledge of the problems faced by farmers and entrepreneurs, resulting from direct discussions with them, led us to formulate the following requirements:

#### 1. Urgent requirements of farmers and local governments in Țara Hațegului

Knowing the state of the rural economy, especially agriculture and rural development in Țara Hațegului, highlights the need for urgent reforms regarding the functioning mechanisms of agricultural holdings and local administrations generating initiatives and performance.

The vast majority of farmers and authorities appreciate that eliminating the weaknesses in the legislation generating bureaucracy and incompetence would be much

more economically and socially efficient in all respects compared to the financial provisions of the National Recovery and Resilience Program, National Rural Development Program and the National Local Development Plan, all taken together.

## **2. Legislative problems generating non-performance in agriculture in Țara Hațegului**

It is known that Romania has the largest share in the EU of public employees - employees of the state in the public domain, ie in what is defined as the bureaucratic system, a fact that we find everywhere in Țara Hațegului. Even if this statistic were not known, the harmful effects of the Romanian economic and social life generated by the bureaucracy are seen and felt everywhere, when a brief analysis of the functionality of the economic initiatives approval system is undertaken as well as the establishment of new activities, projects, etc., due to the excessive bureaucratization of economic and commercial institutions, with direct influence regarding the establishment of new enterprises, preparation and submission of projects, execution and implementation of projects.

The cumbersome regulations issued, as a rule, by the so-called "ministerial technical bodies" are, in most cases, deliberately imprecise, ambiguous, precisely to generate and explain the need for time and, especially, the need for the existence and functioning of the numerous blanket. of evaluators, endorsers and authorizers.

This state of affairs - the excessive bureaucratization of the institutions - we have frequently encountered in Țara Hațegului. Many entrepreneurs give up on new projects or abandon new ones. To the excessive bureaucratization is added another extremely expensive and economophagous phenomenon: excessive centralization. Almost everything, as endorsement, approval, etc., is obtained only from Bucharest, possibly, in a few cases, from the county or the regional authorities. The local decision on the accountability of the institutions is null and void.

### **3. Urgent issues facing the business environment in Țara Hațegului:**

- the total absence of the specialized advisory system needed for agricultural entrepreneurs, farmers (farmers), households, due to the non-existence (and at this date) of the chambers of agriculture;

- the quasi-total absence of specialists from the agricultural directorates in order to provide specialized advice and guidance. The agricultural directorates have remained mere territorial agricultural services which, as they now operate, should be abolished immediately;

- the inadequacy of private consulting firms to draw up, at reasonable prices, the projects needed by entrepreneurs, farmers and rural local authorities to access implementation funds, agricultural business development, local and regional rural development projects;

- the unconsolidated partnership of the agricultural environment (unassociated and unrepresented) with the university and research scientific environment as well as the precarious public-private partnership (more claimed than applied) are other weaknesses of the specialized consultancy;

- the absence of a specialized agricultural bank to finance agriculture and rural development with priority and advantage, the very low interest of commercial banks for agricultural financing and the practice of high interest rates (unacceptable by small agricultural entrepreneurs), expensive commercial credit, etc.

- the shortcomings mentioned above in the vital field of agricultural, economic, commercial, financial, social consultancy for Țara Hațegului (as well as for the entire Romanian rural area) amply demonstrate the way in which the Romanian authorities, first of all the Parliament, the Government and, in particular, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and to some extent Digiagri of the European Union have agreed to legislate, organize and refine (for over 30 years) the support of agriculture.

### **4. Permanent issues faced by farmers in Țara Hațegului**

- total absence of zonal collection centers and temporary storage of products (vegetables, fruits, milk, cheese), farmers often having to market the production obtained in markets, fairs and fields;
- total absence of slaughterhouses for animals, especially sheep;
- the low price of sheep's and cow's milk and the total absence of primary and secondary milk processing centers;
- absence of a bee collection, processing and labeling center, under the brands "Honey from Țara Hațegului", "Honey from Retezat Mountain" etc.
- unfair competition in the market, due to products from non-EU countries (countries where farmers do not comply with the welfare rules and applied treatments imposed by national and EU legislation);
- total absence of project support for development and conversion of fruit growing and the establishment of centers for the collection and processing of existing berries and medicinal plants in the area;
- failure capitalization of wool and sheepskin, due to the non-completion of the initiatives of the Ministry of Agriculture regarding the acquisition and their processing;
- lack of skilled labor in all areas, especially sheep farming, cow farms and vegetable farming;
- although the area has a rich hydrographic network, farmers cannot irrigate agricultural land because they do not receive the environmental permits needed to set up basins to collect water from natural surface or underground sources;
- difficult access to European funds due to non-fulfillment of the mandatory, hard-to-reach conditions and frequent change of eligibility conditions in the applicant's guidelines;
- small subsidies from APIA from European and national funds in the sheep farming sector;
- purchase of agricultural land without notarial registration due to lack of inheritance documents from the seller and non-registration of land;
- difficult and incomplete recovery, through compensation, of damage to agricultural crops caused by wild animals;
- manure management in large and medium-sized livestock farms is another problem facing farmers, as, according to the rules of good practice they have to follow in order to benefit from area subsidies (which prohibits application of manure between October and March), the period in which the manure can be spread overlaps with the vegetation period of agricultural crops.

## CONCLUSIONS

Active economic development projects in the rural agricultural, non-agricultural and service economy, generating value, income from local budgets, with mixed public-private or fully private financing are extremely rare in Țara Hațegului, which highlights the fact that the much-publicized slogan public-private partnership is, rather, either a simple slogan or a desire and much less an economic reality generating economic development.

Țara Hațegului, although it has a sufficiently developed network of rural tourist pensions, is not yet supported by a policy of promoting local agri-food products through local gastronomy, particularly rich, presentation in all restaurants, pensions and shops called "La doi pași -Two steps" of local products with the mark "natural product", "organic product" or "mountain product" from local producers.

The policy of promoting local products is completely absent, although it would have multiple economic effects, both on agricultural producers and traders, but also important effects by promoting local food products (especially mountain products and from local households) healthy for the consumer, thus contributing to the implementation in Romania, too, of the requirements of the European Ecological Pact (Green) from "farm to fork" or of short food chains.

The communities of Țara Hațegului must develop an active and dynamic local economy, based on the development of the main resources and values of the area, which will benefit all citizens in rural areas of the area, but maintaining the character, identity and quality of each area.

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